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ABSTRACT

Teen television, which in large part is made up of moral dilemmas, is often a topic of adolescent discussion. Discussions among adolescent friends are viewed as playing an essential role in moral reasoning development, making it important to investigate television's potential to stimulate these discussions. A study investigated adolescent girls' conversations about teen television dramas to determine whether these types of conversations contained moral dilemma discussions that embodied the elements of conversation hypothesized to promote growth in moral reasoning (i.e., conflict and transactive dialogue/transformation). Differences between unstructured and structured settings for stimulating conversations containing conflict and transactive dialogue/transformation were compared. Twelve pairs of 11-13 year old girls who had watched any of the 11 teen TV shows in syndication during 1999-2000 took part in the study. Participants were evenly distributed across the 6th-8th grades. After viewing a 45-minute program, friends were grouped in pairs to discuss the program with each other and were audiotaped. The investigator induced a moral dilemma conversation by giving the girls a series of questions about the main moral dilemma in the program. Questions were modified for the specific program using Kohlberg's moral judgment interview. Each participant also completed an informational questionnaire. Conversations were transcribed and coded for transactive dialogue/transformation, conflict, and moral reasoning levels present within the conversation. Findings suggest that popular television programs may in fact be excellent teaching tools, presenting real-life illustrations of dilemmas involving serious issues that adolescents may face. Includes a table and three figures. Program summaries are appended. (Contains 22 references.) (BT)

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Teen Television as a Stimulus for Moral Dilemma Discussions:

Adolescent Girls' Conversations about Dawson's Creek, Freaks and Geeks, Get Real, and 7th Heaven

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Introduction

Experts report that America's children mature earlier now than they did 20 years ago. Such statements refer both to the phenomenon of physical maturation, whose earlier onset can best be attributed to improved living conditions and nutrition, and also to the fact that Generation X and Y2K youth often face mature issues from which children of the 60s were sheltered. Such issues as sex, drugs, rape, and gang violence were once taboo topics not discussed with children. Now they are real-life occurrences that many of this nation's youth confront face-to-face whether it be in person or on the television screen (Pipher, 1994). Many times, these issues can be interpreted as moral dilemmas, dilemmas that youth must struggle and reason about as an important part of growing up (Cosaro & Eder, 1990).

One place where mature topics have become more frequent and explicit is on the television screen, a medium reaching nearly 100% of American homes on a daily basis (Roberts, Foehr, Rideout, & Brodie, 1999). Television's influence on children has been researched for more than 40 years, investigating everything from viewing behaviors to learning potential to negative effects. There exists no argument about whether television holds the potential to teach, both when it is designed to be educational (Bogatz & Ball, 1971; Houston & Wright, 1998) and also when it does not intend to teach (Brown & Bryant, 1990; Coats, Feldman, & Philippot, 1999; Wartella, 1987). Teen television, which in large part is made up of moral dilemmas, is often a topic of adolescent discussions. As moral dilemma discussions, particularly between adolescent friends, are viewed as playing an essential and exceptional role in moral reasoning development (Berkowitz & Gibbs, 1983; Damon & Killen, 1982; Kohlberg, 1963; Nelson & Aboud, 1985), it is important to investigate television's potential to stimulate these discussions. Particularly since television is such a prevalent and prominent staple in children's lives (Roberts et al., 1999).

In this study, adolescent girls' conversations about teen television dramas were investigated to determine whether these types of conversations contained moral dilemma discussions that embodied the elements of conversation hypothesized to promote growth in moral reasoning (i.e., conflict and transactive dialogue/transformation). The differences between unstructured and structured settings for stimulating conversations containing conflict and transactive dialogue/transformation were compared, where it was hypothesized that structured settings would promote conversations about moral dilemmas containing more conflict and transactive dialogue/transformation.

Theoretical Framework

This research views learning from television as a social process, one whereby the television message becomes part of a social context. Television is often watched in the company of others, and its content and messages are commonly talked about in daily conversation (Buckingham, 1996). Research has found that conversations about television content can influence reception, interpretation and understanding of both academic and social information (Bybee, Robinson, & Turow, 1982; Dorr & Rabin, 1995; Messaris & Kerr, 1983; Weaver & Barbour, 1992). From such research it becomes clear that the social interaction that takes place around television can especially influence the way in which TV's messages affect learning and social-emotional growth in the individual. This is particularly important when considering TV's roles in both formal and

informal education (school and home). TV holds the potential to serve as a source of moral education informally in the home and holds a tremendous number of benefits when used within a formal education environment.

The friendship relationship, particularly during adolescence, has unique characteristics that serve to foster social-emotional growth (Carlo, Fabes, Laible, & Kupanoff, 1999; Cosaro & Eder, 1990; Schonert-Reichl, 1999). Interestingly, many moral reasoning researchers suggest that conversations between friends often embody certain characteristics necessary for moral reasoning development (Berkowitz & Gibbs, 1983; Damon & Killen, 1982; Kohlberg, 1963; Nelson & Aboud, 1985). For this reason, talking to friends about television content may be the essential interpersonal step allowing the medium's message to create cognitive growth and change within the adolescent individual.

Investigating the discussions among early adolescents and their friends about television content is important if one considers the change in television programming over the last 20 years and, particularly, a recent change in programming that reflects an influx of teen shows geared at America's youth. These shows, with names like *Dawson's Creek* and *Popular,* have taken over many of the primetime time slots once occupied by family sitcoms. Geared at the youth market, these shows focus on the lives of teenagers and the trials and tribulations surrounding this period of development and often embody moral dilemmas as part of their story-line themes. The messages presented in the shows often reflect both the good and bad side of the decision coin alternately, sometimes suggesting "do it," other times enforcing "don't do it;" sometimes portraying "safe behavior," yet other times displaying "risky behavior." These shows are not always about the choices that the characters make, but instead are about the issues (moral dilemmas) the characters face, issues that today's adolescents face, and about which they also have to make choices. In this way, the presentation of these issues creates opportunities for adolescents to discuss multiple moral dilemmas. As presented below, moral dilemma discussions between friends can be successful at promoting growth in moral reasoning when these discussions involve certain characteristics.

Current research on adolescent moral reasoning development finds its basis in Kohlberg's belief that social interactions, particularly those between peers, are crucial for the acquisition of more sophisticated and complex moral reasoning (Colby, Kohlberg, Lawrence, Gibbs, & Lieberman, 1983; Schonert-Reichl, 1999). Many moral reasoning researchers suggest that conversations between friends often embody certain characteristics necessary for moral reasoning development (Berkowitz & Gibbs, 1983; Damon & Killen, 1982; Kohlberg, 1963; Nelson & Aboud, 1985). Among others, the presence of cognitive conflict and the opportunity to resolve that conflict (Nelson & Aboud, 1985; Rubin, Bukowski, & Parker, 1998), the presence of higher levels of moral reasoning (Kohlberg, 1963), and the act of operating on another persons reasoning with one's own reasoning, transactive dialogue/transformation (Berkowitz & Gibbs, 1983; Damon & Killen, 1982), have been suggested as mechanisms through which conversations enhance moral reasoning. In this study, the relationships between the presence of conflict and transactive dialogue with level of moral reasoning were investigated. Due to the significant presence of Kohlberg's traditional levels of moral reasoning in current literature regarding interventions designed to improve moral reasoning, the current study used Kohlberg's levels when classifying participants' moral

reasoning levels. However, attention was paid to the works of Gilligan (1982) when discussing the meaning of various levels of reasoning for the female participants.

This research investigates spontaneous friendship conversations about teen drama television content in the attempt to identify whether such conversations contain both discussions about moral dilemmas depicted on television and two of the elements of conversation suggested to promote growth in moral reasoning (i.e., conflict and transactive dialogue). It was hypothesized that structured learning environments (i.e., requiring friendship pairs to discuss, reason about, and come to consensus on the answers for several questions about the moral dilemma presented in the program) would induce moral dilemma discussions and increase the occurrence of elements within those conversations that have been associated with moral reasoning development.

Methods

Sample

Twelve pairs of 11-13 year old girls, who had watched any of the eleven teen TV shows in syndication during 1999-2000 took part in this research. They were recruited from several locations servicing girls this age (middle schools, Campfire Girls, and private residences). The 24 participants were evenly distributed across the 11-13 year old age range, and also across the 6th-8th grades. The largest proportion of the sample was Caucasian (46%), there were also African Americans (21%), Latinas/Hispanics (17%), and girls of mixed ethnicity (12%) in the sample (Table 1).

Table 1. Age, grade, and ethnicity of study participants by recruitment source.

	Campfire		Private School		Private Individuals		Total	
Age	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
11 yrs	2	8.3%	0	0%	5	21%	7	29%
12 yrs	4	16.6%	3	12.5%	1	4.2%	8	33%
13 yrs	4	16.6%	3	12.5%	2	8.3%	9	38%
Grade								
6th	2	8.3%	0	0%	4	16.6%	6	25%
7th	4	16.6%	6	25%	2	8.3%	12	50%
8th	4	16.6%	0	0%	2	8.3%	6	25%
Ethnicity								
African American	1	4.2%	2	8.3%	2	8.3%	5	21%
Caucasian	4	16.6%	4	16.6%	3	12.5%	11	46%
Latina/ Hispanic	3	12.5%	0	0%	1	4.2%	4	17%
Mixed	1	4.2%	0	0%	2	8.3%	3	12%
Other	1	4.2%	0	0%	0	0%	1	4%

Procedures

Girls were told to find a friend to be their partner for this research. The pair watched either an episode of *7th Heaven, Dawson's Creek, Freaks and Geeks*, or *Get Real* that presented multiple moral dilemmas as a part of its content. Program series and

episode were systematically varied using a randomized number set, to increase the generalizability to "all" teenage television dramas and to reduce the likelihood that any resulting effect was a result of any aspect unique to a single show.

The five episodes of teen television used in this research were chosen to satisfy the following four criteria:

1. The main dilemma was faced by a teenage character (preferably female),
2. The episode showed the character struggling with the dilemma in an attempt to choose a course of action,
3. The character chose a course of action, and
4. A significant amount of time was spent on the story-line involving the chosen moral dilemma.

After viewing the forty-minute program (commercials edited out), friend pairs were told to discuss the program with each other (see Appendix A for summaries of television programs viewed). They were told that they could talk about whatever they wanted regarding the program they had just viewed. These conversations were considered the pairs' spontaneous conversations and were intended to reflect the kinds of discussions they would have in informal settings about such TV shows. All conversations were audio tape-recorded.

After the spontaneous conversation, the investigator induced a moral dilemma conversation by giving the girls a series of questions about the main moral dilemma in the program. These questions required the pairs to reason about the dilemma and choose a course of action, explain their choice of action, and consider various elements that might potentially influence their choice of action or reason for choosing to act a certain way. They were modified for the specific television program from Kohlberg's Moral Judgement Interview (Colby et al., 1983). The girls were told to discuss and answer each question with their partner. Pairs were required to come to a verbal consensus and conclusion for each question before beginning to write down their answer. This conversation was also tape-recorded.

After completing the series of moral dilemma questions, the tape recorder was turned off and each participant was asked to complete an informational questionnaire. The questionnaire contained 40 questions, covering the following categories: (a) television viewing behaviors, (b) normal conversation patterns relating to teen television, (c) simple demographics, and (d) friendship status. Each dyad took between 90 and 120 minutes to complete the entire procedure. The data sources in this research were transcripts of the pairs' spontaneous conversations, induced conversations, and the individuals' informational questionnaires.

Coding

All audio-taped conversations were transcribed and coded for transactive dialogue/transformation, conflict, and moral reasoning levels present within the conversation. This coding used Damon and Killen's (1982) coding manual for identifying transactive dialogue/transformation and conflict in conversations of elementary students and the scoring manual for Kohlberg's Moral Judgment Interview (Colby et al., 1983). A clear example of transactive dialogue/transformation is shown in the following excerpt from a transcription of a conversation from the current study:

S1: "I hate it when my parents are disappointed in me…no, they shouldn't [try smoking cigarettes] because they still don't know their first reaction, and your parents won't trust you."

S2: "yeah, you'll lose trust from your parents and if other people find out what you've done, you might lose some friends. They'll lose respect for you and you'll earn a bad reputation."

In this example, the second speaker took the first speaker's statement about losing a parent's trust and extended the idea to losing a friend's respect and gaining a bad reputation. She builds upon the reasoning of her partner.

Conflict was identified within the moral dilemma discussions whenever participants differed in their ideas about what decision should be made, or why a decision should be made. An example of conflict is shown in the following transcription:

S1: "Should the fact that Andy could be expelled affect her decision? It should, I think it should. If you're about to confess to someone I think it would affect your thinking. Like, 'wow, I know this could, you know, jeopardize it, but is it worth being expelled?' and then some people might think, 'be selfish and think, you know, I would never want to jeopardize my chance of getting into college like that,' so I think it would affect your decision."

S2: "I disagree because I think it shouldn't affect [your decision] because I think that you should still confess no matter how much guilt you feel."

Results/Conclusions

This research investigated the potential of teen television dramas to stimulate moral dilemma discussions containing the qualities necessary to promote moral reasoning growth. Due to the small sample obtained in this study, the evaluation was mainly descriptive; however, whenever possible, correlations and t-tests were performed. The results showed that the television stimulus resulted in rich conversations about moral dilemmas when the girls were prompted (induced) to have moral dilemma discussions. These induced conversations contained large amounts of both conflict and transactive dialougue/transformation (qualities suggested to promote moral reasoning growth). In fact, all but one of the induced discussions contained both conflict and transactive dialogue/transformation. The amount of conflict ranged from 2-14 instances, and the amount of transactive dialogue/transformation ranged from 5-32 instances, with 58% of the induced discussions containing 18 or more instances.

Interestingly, there was a stark contrast between the rich conversations in the induced discussions and the results from the spontaneous discussions. In contrast to the of induced discussions where 11 of 12 (92%) discussions contained both conflict and transactive dialogue/transformation, only 1 of 12 (8%) of the spontaneous discussions displayed any examples of either conflict or transactive dialogue/transformation. While more than half (58%) of the spontaneous conversations contained the mention of a moral dilemma presented in the show, in all but one transcript, no extended discussion about the dilemma ever followed. For example, in reference to a dilemma where two characters were deciding whether to try cigarettes, one girl said "I would never smoke," which could

have been the catalyst for a moral dilemma discussion; however, her partner responded simply, "me neither," and then they continued on to a new topic of conversation. Because most of the conversations lacked moral dilemma discussion between partners, it was impossible for those spontaneous conversations to contain either conflict or transactive dialogue/transformation, since this research required both of these items to occur within the context of a moral dilemma discussion. Two paired t-tests revealed that both the amount of conflict, $t(12)=-4.2$, $p<.01$, and the amount of transactive dialogue/transformation, $t(12)=-6.4$, $p=.000$, were significantly greater in the induced discussions than the spontaneous ones. This finding means that the spontaneous conversations that adolescents have about these types of television shows do not contain moral dilemma discussions with qualities able to enhance their moral reasoning. On the questionnaire, girls were asked to identify and rank the things that they normally talked about in conversations about teen TV shows. Comparisons between the girls' questionnaire responses about normal conversations and their spontaneous discussions revealed that, for the most part, girls spontaneous conversations were very similar to the types of conversations they said they normally had. Limited differences, however, revealed that participants tended to talk more often about main events and what they would do if in a similar situation as a character and less often about feelings in their spontaneous conversations than they indicated they normally did. Since most of the moral dilemmas presented on the teen TV programs tend to be (or involve) main events, and since thinking about what they may do if in a similar situation as a character could serve as a way to reason about the dilemmas presented, it appeared that the pairs actually may have mentioned the dilemmas more often in the spontaneous conversations than they would under normal circumstances.

After establishing the limited presence of moral dilemma discussions in the spontaneous conversations, subsequent analyses were focused on the induced discussions. Friendship status, rating of how often girls talked about these kinds of shows, familiarity with the television program, and moral reasoning level were not related to the amount of conflict or transactive dialogue/transformation in the induced discussions. A total pair friendship score was calculated for each dyad by adding together the friendship scores of each individual. The pair friendship score was used in the investigation about friendship status' relationship to transactive dialogue/transformation and conflict. Scatter plots showed no relationship between either the amount of conflict or transactive dialogue/transformation and the pairs' friendship scores (see Figures 1 and 2). T-tests comparing the means for conflict and transactive dialogue/transformation when the pairs were divided into low and high friendship categories were not significant for either transactive dialogue/transformation or conflict.

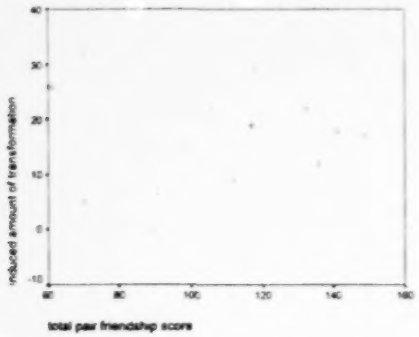

Figure 1. Relationship between pair friendship score and amount of transactive dialogue/transformation.

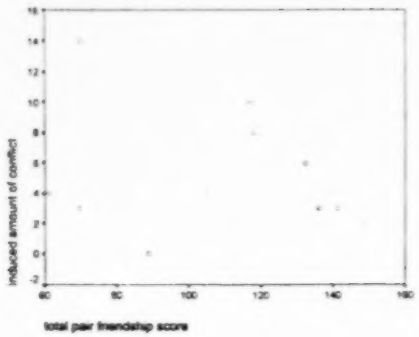

Figure 2. Relationship between pair friendship score and amount of conflict.

Also interesting was whether the amount of teen television watched by the girls on their own would relate to the amount of transactive dialogue/transformation or conflict in their induced conversations, since more frequent viewers might be more familiar with the moral dilemma themes presented in television format. In order to account for the fact that the scores for conflict and transactive dialogue/transformation were the same for each member of the pair, the following analyses were done on five different random samples (n=12) where only one member of each dyad was represented. Two two-tailed t-tests were done on each random sample and indicated that there was no difference in the amount of transactive dialogue/transformation or conflict between girls who had previously watched less than six teen shows (n=12) or six or more teen shows (n=12). Two more two-tailed t-tests were done on each of the five random samples which determined that there was also no difference in amount of transactive dialogue/transformation or conflict between girls who watched four or more teen shows regularly (n=10) and those who watched fewer than four shows regularly (n=14).

It did not appear that how often girls said they talked about these kinds of shows related to the amount of transactive dialogue/transformation in their induced conversations. Crosstabulations and chi-square tests were performed on five random samples (representing only one member of each dyad). Four of the five chi-square analyses were not significant, meaning that the amount of time girls reported talking about teen television with friends was not related to the amount of transactive dialogue/transformation in the induced conversations.

In addition to the previous findings, a graph for each conversation about the first question used as stimulus in the induced condition was created with time along the x-axis and moral reasoning stage on the y-axis. As the conversation progressed through time, each instance of conflict and transactive dialogue/transformation was indicated with a symbol to distinguish between speakers. In addition, comments made over the duration of the conversation were coded for moral reasoning stage and marked chronologically on the graph for each speaker (See Figure 3, for an example). These graphs allowed the author to explore whether the moral reasoning level of each individual changed across the course of the conversation about the first question as a result of being either the provider or the recipient of conflict and transactive dialogue/transformation. It was also possible to investigate whether the lower reasoning member of the dyad was pulled up to meet the

higher reasoning of her partner as the conversation progressed. And, it was possible to examine whether the moral reasoning levels of the individuals increased as a function of the amount of conflict and/or transactive dialgue/transformation contributed by both individuals. Overall, it appeared that there were no patterns to suggest a close relationship between moral reasoning level and either conflict or transactive dialogue/transformation, though the diversity of these graphs made them particularly interesting to examine. Past studies have tended to compare these variables to an overall measure of moral reasoning, not to the moment-to-moment change in moral reasoning as reported and investigated in this study. Because the present research was a first step in investigating the use of television in moral education programs, it was designed to determine whether moral dilemma discussions could be and were stimulated from viewing teen television. This was viewed as a necessary first step to future research on television's role in moral reasoning education to determine how these discussions relate to a change in overall moral reasoning level. Future research involving long-term moral education programs using teen television as a stimulus for moral discussions could better investigate the relationships between the amount of conflict and/or transactive dialogue/transformation to an overall change in moral reasoning level as traditionally explored.

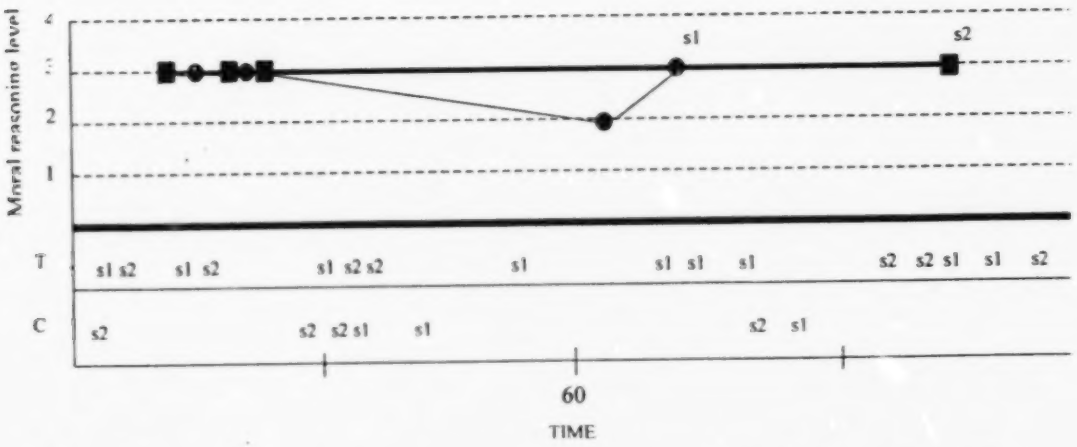

Figure 3. Chart of moral reasoning level and instances of transformation and conflict for each individual over time.

In addition to the findings reported above, which relate to the original hypotheses and research questions, much of the data gathered confirmed Gilligan's (1982) theory of moral reasoning where care is the main element driving female moral reasoning. Eighty-three percent of the girls in this study had at least some level three reasoning in their conversations, suggesting that a care or relational component often guided their reasoning. However, when looking closely at the transcriptions, it was evident that a justice element guided them in their reasoning until a relational element was introduced into the situation upon which a care or relationally based reasoning took precedence.

For example, in the Dawson's Creek video about cheating on the PSAT, most girls initially stated that they should turn themselves in for cheating because that was the

right thing to do. Not until the girls were asked if they should turn themselves into the principal for cheating if their friends might also get in trouble as a result their actions did a relational element take precedence in their reasoning. At this point, all of the girls said that they should not turn themselves in (except one girl who assumed that her friends had also cheated and therefore deserved to get in trouble). The following examples (1-3) show how when the girls who watched this video were prompted with the relational scenario, they favored Gilligan's relational reasoning over other types of reasoning previously given for whether they should turn themselves in or not. This was true for all ethnic groups.

Example 1

S2: "I don't think she should (turn herself in) because I would feel so bad if I got all of my friends in trouble for doing that. That's probably the only circumstance under which I wouldn't tell and um, I think the punishment would probably be just living with yourself after that."

Example 2

S1: "I think she shouldn't because I mean her friends would be really mad and then she would have no friends."

S2: "In a way she shouldn't tell because it's not just yourself you're bringing down, now it's bringing down people who haven't done a single thing wrong."

S1: "And they're your friends too and they've helped you through hard times."

S2: "That puts a whole different outlook on it. So I wouldn't tell."

Example 3

S2: "You shouldn't endanger other people,"

S1: "Because not only will you lose like possible life long friends, but you'll also be considered a dork at school and that's not good."

In the above examples, the girls claimed confession for personal benefit should take a back seat to the more important relational element. The same girls who had responded throughout their interviews that cheating was wrong and they should confess because it would take away their guilt, switched gears entirely and said that under no circumstances should they turn themselves in if that would get their friends in trouble and hurt innocent people. These responses and similar ones from other videos lend great support to Gilligan's (1982) theory. However, interestingly, there were several instances in which girls used justice instead of care to guide their reasoning, as in an instance where several girls chose to turn in a friend for committing a crime, with complete disregard for how this decision may affect their friendship--the girls simply did not care, turning in their friend was the "right thing to do." But, such uses of justice over care were more the exception than the rule.

Discussion

This research was designed to investigate the quality and quantity of moral dilemma discussions occurring spontaneously in the television viewing environment and of those occurring in educational settings designed to induce them. More specifically, this research investigated whether moral dilemmas presented in teen television dramas

stimulated spontaneous moral discussions between adolescent female friends, and to what degree these spontaneous moral dilemma discussions exhibited qualities that have been associated in previous research with the enhancement of moral reasoning (i.e. conflict and transactive dialogue/transformation). More importantly, this research intended to determine whether asking girls to come to consensus about the answers to several questions about the moral dilemma in a program could induce a moral dilemma discussion that increased the occurrence of those elements within the conversation associated with moral reasoning development.

Girls spontaneously mentioned the moral dilemmas presented to them in teen television; however, their conversations did not include discussions about the moral dilemmas. Because the girls' spontaneous conversations failed to involve extended discussions about the moral dilemmas presented in the programs, they also tended not to contain transactive dialogue/transformation and conflict that could affect their moral reasoning. Previous research has suggested that both transactive dialogue/transformation and conflict need to occur within discussions about moral dilemmas in order for them to impact moral reasoning level. Therefore, in reference to the major research questions involving spontaneous conversations, the findings from this research suggest that girls' spontaneous conversations about teen television dramas did not include moral dilemma discussions; consequently, they also did not contain moral reasoning enhancing elements (i.e. conflict and transactive dialogue/transformation).

However, while these programs did not elicit spontaneous moral dilemma discussions, they did offer fodder for moral dilemma discussions when they were used in the more structured environment of the induced scenario, where girls were asked specific, pointed questions regarding the behavior of characters involved in the moral dilemma. During the induced conversations, girls not only were more likely to engage in extended discussions about the moral dilemmas presented in the program, but their discussions contained significantly more conflict and transactive dialogue/transformation than did the few spontaneous discussions of moral dilemmas. As such, it seems that these teen dramas may be good teaching tools to use in youth organizations trying to teach moral reasoning, since they provided adequate stimuli for extensive structured moral dilemma discussions. Because many of the moral dilemmas presented in teen television dramas involve school-age characters, facing age-appropriate issues surrounding academics, friendship, family, honesty, and drugs, for example, they cover many real-life topics that schools (and particularly schools interested in moral development) discuss with their students. Not all schools have adopted the idea that they are responsible for promoting moral education; however, implicitly, such education occurs in all school settings. Future research could explore this area more thoroughly through the long-term investigation of a moral reasoning education program using teen television dramas as the impetus for moral dilemma discussions as opposed to the traditional text or verbal Kohlbergian formats commonly used to stimulate moral discussions.

Surprising were the findings that girls' reports of how often they talked about teen TV shows with their friends and familiarity with the program did not relate to the amount of either conflict or transactive dialogue/transformation. However, both findings make the use of teen TV within moral education more promising, as it appeared to provide equal fodder for discussion between girls who generally talk about TV with friends and those who do not, and for girls who generally watch teen TV and those who do not. Teen

television dramas were selected as a stimulus for moral dilemma discussions in part because adolescent females tend to be familiar with both the characters and story-lines. Their familiarity with the programs could have provided them with more fodder for discussion. For this reason, it was anticipated that greater familiarity with a program might result in greater amounts of either conflict or transactive dialogue/transformation, but it was encouraging to see that this was not the case. There was also concern that girls who generally talk about teen TV with friends might be able to generate more discussion that might result in greater amounts of either conflict or transactive dialogue/transformation, but again this was not the case.

The interview transcripts also yielded some interesting findings regarding Gilligan's (1982) claim about care being the main element driving female moral reasoning. Eighty-three percent of the girls in this study had at least some level three reasoning in their conversations, suggesting that a care or relational component often guided their reasoning. However, when looking closely at the transcriptions, it was not always certain that a care or relationally based reasoning took precedence over reasoning based on other elements, such as justice. The transcriptions suggested that while Gilligan's model of female moral reasoning was useful for explaining most of the moral choices made by girls in this study, there were a few instances where the girls acted in a way that did not favor a care or relational component.

Challenge to Gilligan's theory mainly occurred in the girls' responses to the Get Real video about crashing the car. In this video, the girls were faced with a dilemma in which acting on behalf of a relationship would be to no direct benefit to the individual, and might in fact get them in trouble. For example, the girls were asked if Megan should lie to the principal to protect her friend Amy from getting in trouble. There are several relational reasons why Megan might choose to lie for her friend, and in the video Megan does decide to lie for her. However, the girls in this research had a difficult time rationalizing placing themselves in danger of getting in trouble by lying for Amy. It seems that in particular, putting themselves in danger of getting in trouble firmly outweighed the desire to preserve a relationship and help a friend in need. It is possible to believe that girls may have responded more in accordance with Gilligan's theory had the choice to help their friend not required them to let Amy off the hook for the crime she had committed; however, the same girls who said that they would not lie for Amy said that they would lie to protect Cam (Megan's brother who also committed the same crime). It seemed that when questioned about Cam, the girls allowed a care element to drive their reasoning about their moral choice. It is not clear why they failed to do the same with Amy, and instead allowed more of a justice element to drive their reasoning.

Conclusion

The most important finding from this study for individuals interested in moral reasoning in education, was that popular television programs may in fact be excellent teaching tools, presenting real-life illustrations of dilemmas involving serious issues that adolescents may face. Structured conversations surrounding these programs were rich in qualities shown to enhance moral reasoning, and these structured environments were easy to create. Providing pairs with a pre-prepared set of questions about the dilemma to discuss and significantly increased the amount moral dilemma discussions and conflict and transactive dialogue/transformation within those discussions. These programs

provide an audio, visual, and context-laden alternative to written dilemmas that classrooms often discuss. However, because this study only investigated pairs of girls who were friends, the transition to the classroom is not automatic. Yet, this research found no significant difference between girls of varying degrees of friendship, and moral reasoning literature suggests that group discussions are just as effective as pair discussions for enhancing moral reasoning. Future research should investigate the success of using a TV stimulus with boys in order to help determine the success of such a stimulus in a classroom setting. Nonetheless, this information is particularly useful to school settings that aim to enhance the moral reasoning of adolescents because it provides a promising way to get adolescents engaged in, and personally connected to, the dilemmas they are discussing. In addition, these findings may also be relevant for parents and youth organizations facing the challenges of moral education.

Upon its inception, this research intended to fill a gap in the current literature on discussion as a mechanism through which television can enhance social/moral growth and development both in formal and informal education settings. Because this research used real-life popular TV programs in their entirety, had adolescents who knew each other and might realistically discuss the shows together, and ran the study in everyday settings that were familiar to the participants, the results are particularly valid for school settings. Teen television programs were excellent fodder for discussions that other research has shown promotes moral reasoning growth, provided a task that elicits discussion is given. Since this task-giving is a typical thing a teacher might do, the validity for school settings increases even more so. The value of this research resides in the heart of a search for the appropriate place to provide moral education--in the classroom or in the home--and a television stimulus for such education may allow both environments to be successful.

Appendix A
Program summaries for the five episodes used in this research

Show #1: Get Real, aired on 1-26-00

Amy, Megan's friend, is in a car with Cameron, Megan's older brother, which crashes through the front doors of the school. Amy asks Megan to lie to the principal for her about her whereabouts that night and say that she was studying with Megan. The main moral dilemma in this program is Megan's dilemma about whether she should lie to the school principal for her friend, Amy. Also in this program, Clay, Amy's ex-boyfriend, asks Megan to the school dance. Kenny, Megan's little brother, gets an anonymous invitation to the school dance that turns out to be from a girl who is hearing impaired. Mitch, Megan's dad, is considering becoming business associates with an attractive female colleague.

Show #2: Dawson's Creek, aired on 2-9-00

Joey paints a mural for the school. A known trouble-maker defaces her mural before its unveiling. The main moral dilemma in this program involves Andy, a straight A student and disciplinary committee member, who has to decide whether to tell the principal that she cheated on the PSAT. Also in this program, Pacey gets in a fight with the guy who defaced Joey's mural.

Show #3: 7th Heaven, aired on 1-31-00

Simon and Nigel (2 preteen boys) have decided to investigate how many stores will sell cigarettes to minors as their school project. The main moral dilemma in this program involves the boys' decision about whether to smoke the cigarettes they have collected as a result of their project. Also in this program, Matt's girlfriend moves to New York, he sulks about her absence the entire episode. Mary and Lucy go on a double date to the movies. Eric, the father, spends the entire episode struggling with whether to trust/how to trust his children, and ends up spying on both Simon and Mary.

Show #4: Freaks and Geeks, aired on 3-13-00

Sam sees his friend's father hugging another woman in the mall. The main moral dilemma in this program involves Sam's struggle with whether to tell his friend about what he saw. His friend finds out about his father's actions in the mall and tries to figure out if his father is having an affair. Also in this program, Sam's older sister, Lindsey and her friends discuss the politics of dating and how not to lead someone on.

Show #5: Get Real, aired on 3-29-00

Megan starts interning for an old family friend, Andrew, whom she used to have a crush on as a kid. After work one day the two of them go to dinner together and then Andrew forcefully tries to kiss her. Megan's boyfriend gets in a fight with Andrew about trying to force himself on Megan. The main moral dilemma in this program is Megan's struggle with whether to tell her parents about what happened, since her father is currently in the middle of a business deal with Andrew's parents. The entire family gets involved in Megan's dilemma. Meanwhile, Megan's two brothers are busy thinking of ways to impress their girlfriends, and they decide to take them to see a meteor shower.

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